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Coping with brutal Efficiency: How advisors are helping federal workers
By Rob Burgess
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As decisions handed down by the Trump administration's new Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) reverberate through the federal workforce, confused and frustrated employees have sought guidance from — and solace in — their financial advisors.

The cuts have been both deep and wide, affecting over 62,000 government employees across a number of agencies including the National Weather Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, Defense Department, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and more. (Over 24,000 of these employees were ordered to be rehired in recent days by a federal judge.)

Patrick Beagle, owner and president of WealthCrest Financial Services in Springfield, Virginia, said his clientele is almost exclusively federal employees and military members.

"I used to say, 'Have you ever thought about how hard it is to fire a Fed?' I don't say that anymore," he said. "I urge them not to focus on what they cannot control, [but to] continue to do their job."

Marta Haydym-Silver, principal at Silver Financial Services in Westbrook, Maine, said a lot of federal employees' long-held beliefs about government careers being "safe" are being challenged.

"This is all happening to them and many feel powerless," she said. "On top of our normal work of being financial planners, this is also when we need to listen to our clients and be their personal cheerleaders. Even highly capable, intelligent people get scared, and sometimes they need some emotional intelligence instead of just numbers coaching. This is the time to be calling your clients who are federal employees and your job to go above and beyond for them as whole people."

Guli Fager, a financial advisor at Toler Financial Group in Silver Spring, Maryland, said many federal employees she speaks with are "feeling incredibly wounded because their life's work is being called into question."

"I have a background in public health, and I've also been laid off, so I can relate to many folks in affected agencies and programs," she said. "Being able to acknowledge and validate the work folks have done goes a long way toward building trust."

Fager said her approach has been to make herself as available as possible to her clients and their colleagues. She has been holding free weekly office hours to provide advice on financial triage post-layoff.

"Federal employment is normally stable, so many of these people may be facing this type of uncertainty for the first time," she said.

Anxiety is 'off the charts' as uncertainty reigns

Beagle, who also teaches pre-retirement classes to federal employees, said his "phone and meeting schedule is off the charts as people share their concerns and weigh their options."

Many of his clients are worried, speculating about what their futures may hold because they have not yet received actionable options or offers, Beagle said.

"They are hearing rumors, reading news articles and listening to water cooler gossip," he said. "Most of it is bad information. Of those that called me and were considering the initial resignation option, only those that were already going to retire — those who are retirement eligible — took the deal."

Brian Kuhn, a senior vice president and financial advisor at Wealth Enhancement Group in Fulton, Maryland, said recently hired federal employees are worried about their career while longer-term employees are worried about being able to retire and obtain health insurance if they are fired. He said these clients also expressed worries about the projects they were working on "not being fulfilled for the American people."

"They also generally worry about the direction of our country and government services like national parks and science," he said.

Jay Zigmont, CEO and founder of Childfree Wealth in Mount Juliet, Tennessee, said his firm has been conducting regular outreach as clients react to the federal changes.

"It is not only people who have federal jobs that are impacted but also people who rely on federal funding, such as many universities and nonprofits," he said.

Zigmont said the lack of clear guidance and expectations is especially challenging.

"Uncertainty is not good for anyone," he said. "We are working on safety plans with our clients. It starts with building up an emergency fund and creating a 'Plan B' if things go bad for them. Their Plan B varies greatly but for some, it includes a new job, others moving to a new state or even a new country."

Return to office means finding a new job, for many

Among the flurry of executive orders that President Trump signed in the first hours of his second term was one mandating a "Return to In-Person Work."

The order stipulated executive branch agencies (such as the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Education) should "take all necessary steps to terminate remote work arrangements and require employees to return to work in-person at their respective duty stations on a full-time basis."

Beagle said this order will likely lead to more resignations.

"I speak to a large number [of government employees] that moved away from the Washington, D.C. area — as far as the West Coast," he said. "They have already said they will not move back."

John Bell, owner and lead financial planner of Free State Financial Planning in Highland, Maryland, said he has several clients as well as family members who are government employees. He said he has seen clients who took the "fork in the road" because they were working remotely and did not want to travel back into the office.

"For them, it was a decision to not change their work and life balance," he said. "For those near retirement, and already commuting to the office, it is more of a ho-hum attitude. They are somewhat ambivalent about it as they are eligible for retirement and if they are part of a reduction in forcewill just retire or look for something in the private sector."

Kuhn said federal employees are concerned that their agency might relocate and about whether they can travel with it.

"They are worried about property values near where they work and live with so many other federal workers potentially leaving at the same time, at least in the Washington, D.C. metro area," he said.

Helping clients move forward with logic, not emotions

Elizabeth Zelinka Parsons, co-founder of retirement coaching firm Encoraco, said many suddenly displaced federal employees are now dealing with a "host of heavy emotions."

"These include resentment and rage from the injustice of losing their jobs, grief from the loss of professional identity and overwhelm from now needing to think about a retirement they once assumed to be five or 10 years away."

Parsons said she emphasizes with clients that "forced or not, unprocessed anger and grief should never be the defining features of one's retirement."

"Going into retirement without proper planning is foreshadowing disaster," she said. "Dealing with the heavy emotions around the injustice, grieving your losses and putting together a solid plan are all vital for creating a positive and empowered transition into the next step of your life."

Unexpected retirements and uncertain benefits

Lisa Whitley, owner of MoneyByLisa in Washington, D.C., is a retired U.S. foreign service officer with the USAID and is now practicing as a financial coach and planner.

Among her clients, who mostly have more than a decade of government service, Whitley said her primary concern is retirement preparedness.

"They did not expect to retire from the federal government in 2025," she said. "For those who have already reached the federal minimum retirement age, the planning challenge is somewhat easier. But for those being forced to leave before the normal federal retirement age, it is still uncertain what benefits they will be entitled to."

Whitley said her overarching advice to clients is to not make permanent decisions any earlier than needed.

"For example, the decision — for someone below retirement age — to take a refund of their federal pension contributions is a profound, irreversible decision that must be made with care," she said. "It is not a decision that needs to be made immediately upon separation when emotions are running high."

Zigmont said he is proactively encouraging clients to lower their risk profile and focus on their own physical and mental safety.

"Discussions of long-term planning need to be put on hold, and clients need to know we are there for them if the worst happens," he said.